

Message Text

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USMISSION USBERLIN

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AMEMBASSY SOFIA

AMEMBASSY SEOUL
AMEMBASSY TAIPEI
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
USDEL MBFR VIENNA
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CINCEUR
CINCLANT
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 0780

MILITARY ADDRESSEES FOR POLADS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, CH, UR
SUBJ: CURRENT SOVIET POLICY TOWARD CHINA

1. SUMMARY. PEKING'S RELEASE OF THE SOVIET HELICOPTER CREW AND THE DEATH OF CHOU EN-LAI HAVE PROVIDED MOSCOW WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO TRY TO UNSTICK SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS AND WORK THEM TOWARDS A MORE NORMAL LEVEL. INDEED, MOSCOW WAS PUT ON THE SPOT. THE LEVEL OF ANTI-PEKING PROPAGANDA REMAINED LOW FOR A WHILE, AND PRIVATELY THE SOVIETS REACTED WITH CAUTION AND DEFENSIVENESS, AS THOUGH THEY EXPECTED TO BE HOODWINKED AND COULD BEST AVOID THAT BY DOING NOTHING. BUT SOVIET POLEMICS HAVE NOW RESUMED WITH THE STRONG ALEKSANDROV COMMENTARY IN PRAVDA (JAN 16), WHICH IGNORED RECENT EVENTS AND CONCENTRATED ON PEKING'S ANTI-SOVIETISM. IN OUR VIEW, PEKING WILL REMAIN AN ADVERSARY IN SOVIET EYES UNTIL A CHINESE LEADER TAKES POWER WHO WOULD ADVOCATE A RETURN TO THE BOSOM OF THE "SOCIALIST" FAMILY. THERE IS NO VISIBLE INTERNAL PRESSURE ON MOSCOW TO BE MORE FORTHCOMING TOWARD CHINA. END SUMMARY.

2. SINCE THE 1969 SINO-SOVIET BORDER CLASHES, RELATIONS BETWEEN MOSCOW AND PEKING HAVE STOOD WELL ON THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF THE SCALE, STRAINED BUT STABLE WITH LITTLE CONFIDENTIAL

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APPARENT FLUCTUATION. PEKING'S RELEASE OF THE SOVIET HELICOPTER CREW AND THE ACCOMPANYING STATEMENT CONSTITUTE THE FIRST UNEQUIVOCALLY POSITIVE CHINESE MOVE SINCE THE CHOU-KOSYGIN MEETING OF SEPTEMBER 1969 AND THE OPENING OF THE BORDER TALKS A MONTH LATER. PRESUMABLY THE CHINESE DECIDED SOME TIME AGO THAT THE CREWMEN'S STORY WAS "CREDIBLE". THE QUESTION THEN BECAME ONE OF TIMING: WHEN COULD THE RELEASE ACHIEVE

MAXIMUM IMPACT? IN LATE DECEMBER 1975, WHEN THE DECISION WAS FINALLY MADE TO GO AHEAD, PEKING HAD RECENTLY HOSTED PRESIDENT FORD, IT WAS EXPECTING PREMIER CHOU TO DIE ANY DAY, IT HAD JUST RELEASED THE LAST GROUP OF SENIOR CHINESE NATIONALIST OFFICERS, IT KNEW OF GROMYKO'S PLANS TO VISIT TOKYO SHORTLY, AND THE SOVIETS WERE GEARING UP FOR THEIR PARTY CONGRESS IN FEBRUARY. AT THE OUTSIDE, THE CHINESE MAY HAVE WISHED THEIR MOVE TO INFLUENCE THE SOVIET PARTY CONGRESS, THE PROPOSED EUROPEAN COMMUNIST CONFERENCE, SOVIET-JAPANESE RELATIONS BY SENDING A SIGNAL TO WASHINGTON THAT A MORE FLEXIBLE POLICY TOWARD MOSCOW WAS ONE OF PEKING'S OPTIONS. AT THE INSIDE, THEY MAY SIMPLY HAVE WISHED TO PREEMPT SOVIET ATTEMPTS TO MEDDLE IN THE CHINESE SUCCESSION. THE SOVIETS COULD STILL MAKE SOME SORT OF ANSWERING GESTURE, AND IT IS CONCEIVABLE, IF UNLIKELY, THAT A SCENARIO OF SMALL MUTUAL STEPS COULD PUSH THE SCALE TO THE POSITIVE SIDE. HOWEVER, IT IS MUCH MORE LIKELY THAT SOVIETS SEE THE RELEASE AS A GESTURE INTENDED TO COVER CONTINUING CHINESE HOSTILITY AND THE INDICATIONS SO FAR SUGGEST THAT A SIGNIFICANT POSITIVE RESPONSE IS IMPROBABLE.

3. HOWEVER, FOR NEARLY THREE WEEKS AFTER THE RELEASE, MOSCOW RESPONDED BY TURNING DOWN THE VOLUME OF ANTI-PEKING PROPAGANDA TO ITS LOWEST LEVEL IN RECENT YEARS. ALL SOVIET MEDIA REPORTED THE RELEASE AND THE CREW'S RETURN TO MOSCOW, BUT THE EVENT HAS NOT BEEN MENTIONED IN ANY COMMENTARY. NOW THE POLEMICS HAVE RESUMED, MOST NOTABLY WITH THE "ALEKSANDROV" ARTICLE (MOSCOW 0694 NOTAL). IN EARLIER INDICATIONS, A PUBLIC LECTURER AND OTHER SOVIET OBSERVERS EMPHASIZED THT THE SOVIET LINE WAS "CORRECT" BOTH ON THE HELICOPTER INCIDENT AND

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IN GENERAL ON CHINA (MOSCOW 0399 AND 0463 NOTAL). THEY EXPRESSED PLEASURE AND SURPRISE AT THE RELEASE, BUT HESITATED TO DRAW IMPLICATIONS FOR THE BROADER IMPROVEMENT OF BILATERAL RELATIONS. THEY SAID THAT MOSCOW HAS ALWAYS FAVORED BETTER INTERSTATE RELATIONS AND THAT IT WAS UP TO PEKING TO RESPOND TO EXISTING PROPOSALS. BUT THEY SAW PEKING'S ANTI-SOVIET PROPAGANDA AS AN INDICATION OF UNCEASING CHINESE HOSTILITY. ALTHOUGH WE WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED TO SEE CHIEF BORDER NEGOTIATOR IL'ICHEV SENT BACK TO PEKING FAIRLY SOON, WE STRONGLY DOUBT THAT MOSCOW WILL MAKE ANY OTHER POSITIVE GESTURE IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

4. CHOU EN-LAI'S DEATH COMPOUNDED THE PROBLEM FROM MOSCOW'S PERSPECTIVE. ALTHOUGH THE EVENT ITSELF WAS

LONG EXPECTED, IT HIGHLIGHTED THE LEADERSHIP TRANSITION IN CHINA. THE SOVIETS HAVE GENERALLY TREATED CHOU CIRCUMSPECTLY, AND HAVE PORTRAYED MAO TSE-TUNG AS THE MAIN OBSTACLE TO BETTER RELATIONS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THEY WERE WELL AWARE OF CHOU'S MANY ANTI-SOVIET DIATRIBES TO A GREAT NUMBER OF FOREIGN VISITORS TO CHINA. IN ANY CASE, THEY CHOSE TO TREAT CHOU'S DEATH ACCORDING TO MINIMUM PROTOCOL REQUIREMENTS RATHER THAN USE IT TO OFFER A SYMBOLIC GESTURE OF CONCILIATION. THIS DECISION UNDERSCORES THEIR CAUTIOUS LINE ON THE CREW RELEASE. PRIVATELY, THE SOVIETS HAVE DESCRIBED TENG HSIAO-PING AS MERELY A TRANSITIONAL FIGURE, A "DWARF" WHO WAS RESCUED FROM OBLIVION IN PART BECAUSE OF HIS ANTI-SOVIET VIEWS.

5. ALTHOUGH THEY PROFESS TO BELIEVE IN THE INEVITABILITY OF CHINA'S EVENTUAL RETURN TO THE SOCIALIST FOLD, THE SOVIETS ARE UNWILLING TO FIX A TIME WHEN THIS MIGHT HAPPEN. THEY SAY THAT INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES IN CHINA IN RECENT YEARS WILL SERVE TO PERPETUATE MAOISM AFTER MAO AND THEIR OWN POLICY SEEMS TO ASSUME PROLONGED COMPETITION.

6. AT PRESENT THIS COMPETITION WORKS ON FOUR LEVELS WHICH ARE MUTUALLY REINFORCING:

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(1) THE STATE LEVEL, WHERE THE TWO SIDES DIFFER ON SPECIFIC ISSUES, ESPECIALLY THE BORDER, WHICH BOTH CONSIDER IMPORTANT;

(2) THE IDEOLOGICAL LEVEL WHERE MOSCOW AND PEKING VIEW EACH OTHER RESPECTIVELY AS HERETICS FROM THE TRUE FAITH OF MARXISM-LENINISM AND THEMSELVES AS KEEPERS OF THE FAITH;

(3) THE THIRD-COUNTRY LEVEL WHERE RELATIONS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES ARE PREMISED ON CONTINUED SINO-SOVIET HOSTILITY; AND

(4) THE "GUT" LEVEL WHERE FUNDAMENTAL CULTURAL STEROTYPES REINFORCE ANTIPATHY.

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AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMCONSUL MUNICH

USMISSION NATO

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USLO PEKING

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MOSCOW 0780

MILITARY ADDRESSEES FOR POLADS

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7. TAKEN SEPARATELY SOME OF THESE FRICTIONS, ESPECIALLY THOSE ON THE STATE-TO-STATE LEVELS MIGHT BE SOLUBLE. BUT TAKEN TOGETHER, THEY ARE LIKELY TO PREVENT ANY SIGNIFICANT RAPPROACHMENT IN THE VISIBLE FUTURE. THE SINO-SOVIET MARRIAGE OF THE 1950'S WAS CLEARLY ONE OF CONVENIENCE AND SOME AFFINITY, BUT NOT LOVE. THE DIVORCE WAS ABRUPT AND RANCOROUS, WITH MUTUAL CHARGES OF BETRAYAL AND DISLOYALTY. LIKE FORMER MARRIAGE PARTNERS, THEY MAKE LIMITED ACCOMMODATIONS FOR THEIR MUTUAL ADVANTAGE, BUT BOTH WILL LOOK ELSEWHERE FOR FUTURE FRIENDS AND ARE NOT LIKELY TO SHARE THE SAME BED AGAIN. THE CUSTODY OF THE OFFSPRING (I.E., OTHER COMMUNIST AND "PROGRESSIVE" PARTIES AND COUNTRIES) OR THE MANNER IN WHICH THEY ARE TO BE BROUGHT UP REMAINS, HOWEVER, A MATTER OF BITTER CONTENTION AS EACH SEEKS TO GAIN THEIR LOYALTY AND TO EXCLUDE THE OTHER. THE PROBLEM OF FINDING A COURT WITH JURISDICTION PERSISTS, HOWEVER, SINCE IT NO LONGER SITS IN EITHER MOSCOW OR PEKING ALONE.

8. ANGOLA IS AN EXAMPLE OF THIS CONTENTION, BUT THE MAIN ARENA OF RIVALRY IS ALONG THE PERIPHERY OF CHINA. GROMYKO'S UNSECCESFUL VISIT
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TO TOKYO WAS PART OF MOSCOW'S ATTEMPT TO THROW SAND IN THE GEARS OF IMPROVING SINO-JAPANESE RELATIONS. MOSCOW'S GENEROSITY TOWARD HANOI AND VIETNAME IS BASED IN PART ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT A STRONG VIETNAME FURNISHES THE BEST BULWARK AGAINST THE EXPANSION OF CHINESE INFLUENCE IN INDOCHINA AND BEYOND. AND THE CORDIALITY OF SOVIET-INDIAN RELATIONS IS FEARED BY THE HOSTILITY OF BOTH TO CHINA.

9. INITIATIVES IN SOVIET CHINA POLICY ARE ALSO HAMPRED BY THE NEGATIVE INERTIA OF THE PAST FIFTEEN YEARS. THE PEOPLE AND INSTITUTIONS WHICH ADVISE THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP ON CHINA POLICY ARE OPENLY HOSTILE TO THE PRESENT PRC LEADERS AND TO THEIR DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICIES. ONE SOVIET OFFICIAL TOLD US RECENTLY THAT THERE ARE "NO DOVES" ON CHINA. SOME ARGUE FOR A HARDER LINE, HE SAID, BUT MOST SUPPORT THE PRESENT POSUTRE (75 MOSCOW 18499). NOBODY IS FOR RECONSILIATION ON CHINES TERMS.

10. ON ANOTHER PLANE, "MAOIST DEVIATIONISM" AND "HEGEMONISTIC STRIVINGS" REINFORCE THE SOVIET COMMITMENT TO DETENTE WITH THE WEST. THEY PERMIT THE SOVIETS TO STRADDLE A "CENTRIST" POSITION, FAVORING THE RELAXATION OF TENSIONS AND PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE, WHILE NOT DENYING CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR "REVOLUTIONARY" MOVEMENTS. OPPONENTS ON BOTH SIDES, "REACTIONARIES" AND, EVEN MORE VEHEMENTLY, "MAOISTS," ARE LABELLED HERETICS, AND PORTRAYED AS BEING NOT MERELY ANTI-SOVIET BUT ANTI-PEACE. THE EXISTENCE OF MAOISM ALSO LEGITIMIZES THE CURRENT LEADERSHIP'S PREDILECTION FOR PRUDENCE AND CAUTION, FOR A "PRINCIPLED AND CONSISTENT" FOREIGN POLICY LINE, AND VALIDATES ITS SELF-IMAGE AS KEEPER OF THE "TRUE FAITH."

11. TURNING THIS FACTOR AROUND, THE SOVIET COMMITMENT TO DETENTE MAKES IT HARDER FOR THIS LEADERSHIP, AT LEAST, TO DISPENSE WITH THE "MAOIST DEVIATION" IN ITS CALCULATIONS AND, EVEN MORE, IN ITS PERCEPTIONS. DESPITE THE CHANGES IN THE WORLD OVER THE

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PAST SIXTY YEARS AND THE CHANGES AT HOME OVER THE PAST TWENTY, THE SOVIET UNION TO SOME EXTEN REMAINS A GARRISON STATE HELD TOGETHER BY A MILITANT IDEOLOGY. TO THAT EXTEN AN EXTERNAL ENEMY, THE OLD THREAT FROM ABROAD REMAINS A NECESSARY INGREDIENT IN THE SOVIET VIEW OF THE WORLD. AND AS DETENTE BLURS THE CONTOURS AND DIMINISHES THE FEROCITY OF THE "CAPITALIST THREAT," FIRST ON A WORLDWIDE BASIS AND THEN IN EUROPE, THIS FUNCTION IS TRANSFERRED TO MAOISM.

12. FINALLY, AT THE DEEPEST LEVEL, EXTENDING FAR BELOW CALCULATIONS OF INTEREST AND EVEN OF STRATEGY, RUSSIAN ANTIPATHY TO THE CHINESE AS INCARNATIONS OF THE GOLDEN HORDES OF YORE WILL REMAIN AN

OBSTACLE TO RECONCILIATION. EUROPEAN SOVIETS OF
EVERY STRIPE--OFFICIALS, DISSIDENTS, SPECIALIST AND
ORDINARY PEOPLE--VIEW THE CHINESE WITH SUSPICION AND
EVEN FEAR.
SUCH UNDERLYING ATTITUDES DO NOT MEAN THAT SOVIET POLICY
IS IMMUTABLE, BUT THEY LIKEWISE DO NOT SUGGEST THAT
MOSCOW WILL BE EAGER TO PATCH THINGS UP WITH PEKING,
EXCEPT IN THE MOST SUPERFICIAL MANNER.
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